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SPECIFIC AREA REPORT

RED RIVER CYPRESS SWAMP

LOUISIANA

United States

Department of the Interior

National Park Service

Region One

June 1962

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LOCATION MAP

RED RIVER CYPRESS SWAMP

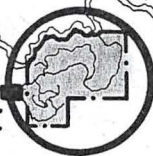
LOUISIANA



RED

ALEXANDRIA

MARKSVILLE



RIVER

NATCHEZ

MISS.
LA.

MISSISSIPPI

BATON
ROUGE

LAKE
CHARLES

ATCHAFALAYA

RIVER

RIVER

GULF OF MEXICO

RED RIVER CYPRESS SWAMP

LOUISIANA

INTRODUCTION

Red River Cypress Swamp, Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana was brought to Service attention by William Wells, Assistant Director of Louisiana State Parks and Recreation Commission during May 1961 when Region One park planners were conducting reconnaissance study in the state in connection with work on the National Recreation Plan.

The area was tentatively described as being located along the Red River some 15 miles northeast from Marksville, and as a typical cypress swamp some 15,000 acres in size. It was noted as such and recommended for study by routine submission of Recommended Work Program Summary, October 24, 1961. Approval for this and other studies was given November 9, 1961 in a memorandum to Regional Director, Region One, from Associate Director Scoyen.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Red River Cypress Swamp, located along the Red River northeast of Marksville, Louisiana in Avoyelles Parish is an area of approximately 50,000 acres.

All the land inside the study area boundary is in private ownership.

Although apparently at one time a unique river bottom area the changes brought about by logging, drainage, and dam building have so altered the site that scientific importance is now lacking.

Heavy use of the area is being made by fishermen from the local and regional area while recreational boating and hunting are of somewhat lesser importance.

The area does not warrant scientific recognition at the national level.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that no further consideration be given to Red River Cypress Swamp as a possible addition to the National Park System as a National Monument.

DESCRIPTION

Red River Cypress Swamp is an area of low relief along the Red River, the interior of which is accessible only by boat along the winding waterways which connect the numerous oxbow lakes and small ponds in the area. It was once a fine river bottom swamp but with the logging of the cypress and other trees of merchantable size and species many years ago and the accomplishment of cultural works during the past thirty-five to forty years its natural character has been severely altered.

The details regarding what has happened at this area were obtained during two days of field study and contacting of local residents, businessmen and fishing guides and are presented below.

Prior to 1924, water hyacinth became established in the waterways and by that year had become so thick as to make travel by boat almost impossible. During 1924, a canal was dug connecting the lakes and waterways in the area to the Red River thus draining out almost all water. When the water hyacinth and other aquatic plants had become dry, fires, which in some locations burned for six months, were lit. The plan was to burn only aquatic plants which had been

clogging the waterways but some trees and other plants were also burned. However, the plan to eliminate the water hyacinth appears to have been a complete success.

The next step in the plan of waterway improvement was to build a dam across Lake Long near the Red River and bring the water in the swamp area back up its former level. By seepage and by overflow during times of high water in the Red River, the lakes and waterways were again filled - minus the water hyacinth.

Little harm appears to have been done to the fish population but the draining and burning did drive out almost all the alligators, and few are seen today where once there were many. Additionally, the unnatural condition created by the draining and later dam construction appears to have struck a blow at the integrity of the area, which, even if it were the only adverse element now present, would cast serious doubt upon it as a possible candidate for preservation as a State or National Monument.

Several years ago, in 1957 or 1958, land owners along Lake Long began to complain that the dam holding back water in the swamp complex was causing water to stay on their property for too long a period each year thereby reducing its value as grazing land. The simple solution - remove the dam - was decided upon and one

night a charge of dynamite breached the dam. Of course, the upstream land owners, when they awoke the next morning to find the water level in their lakes, ponds and waterways rapidly going down, hurriedly boated downstream and repaired the dam. This sequence was repeated at least once, perhaps several times, until cooler heads prevailed and a temporary dam was built well upstream at Boggy Bayou. This held water in the Lac Aux Siene - Grand Bay - Old River complex but severely restricted the sport fishing opportunities, cut down on the need for rental boats and lessened the need for fishing guides. Additionally, it was inconvenient to drag boats up over the dam to get into and out of the fishing area. In 1958 or 59 the present earth dam, which holds back 8 to 10 feet of water, and forms the existing waterway complex, was built.

Scenically, the area presents a pleasing but not outstanding atmosphere for outdoor recreation related to the waterways and boating. Trees and shrubs closely line the banks except in scattered spots where privately owned vacation cottages have been built. The artificial water level now maintained has killed many trees along certain sections of the waterways, the dead snags detracting somewhat from the scene.

Considering the recreational aspect, it is noted that Red River Cypress Swamp provides very good fishing, some hunting and a limited amount of boating. Scattered private vacation cottages afford owners opportunities to enjoy the pleasant surroundings but there is neither space nor expanse for large scale recreation developments. Privately operated fish camps near Marksville provide auto and boat trailer parking areas, launching sites, rental boats, supplies and services for users of the waterways and there are guides available for hire.

Bass, bream, perch, catfish, buffalo, bluegill and goggle-eye are the fish most commonly caught and during the hunting season, deer, ducks, and squirrels are sought.

EXISTING DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF LAND AND RESOURCES

Agricultural use of the area is limited to grazing of cattle and hogs on some of the drier portions of the swamp. Cypress stumps along the waterways indicate that the cypress was cut a number of years ago but there is no evidence of logging activity now or in more recent years. As mentioned above, there is considerable recreation use of the fish and waters and to a lesser extent the harvesting by hunting of game animals.

In addition to the dam, which is the major adverse development insofar as scientific values are concerned, there are a limited number of scattered privately-owned vacation cottages located along the bank of the waterways. There are no year-round residences inside the study area.

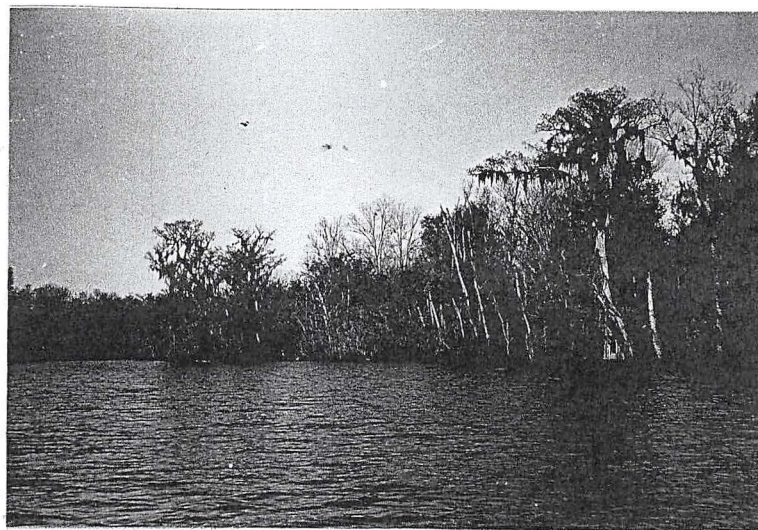
SUITABILITY

This area does not appear to be suitable for consideration for possible inclusion in the National Park System. The natural values have been seriously altered by logging and by the drainage canal and dam building activities carried out some years ago and, although the general scene is pleasant, the dead snags standing in the water in some places produce a most unnatural appearance.

Although the area is quite adaptable to its present use as a local area for recreational boating, fishing and hunting, its significance appears to be limited to just that. Local interests have developed and are maintaining the present recreational opportunity and at this time are adequately providing for safe, convenient and comfortable use by visitors.

BOUNDARIES AND ACREAGES

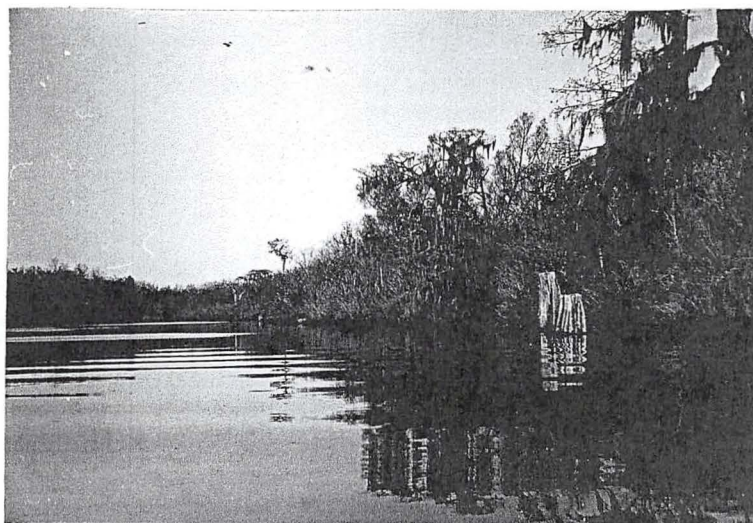
The boundary lines of the study area as shown on the attached map enclose an area of approximately 50,000 acres.



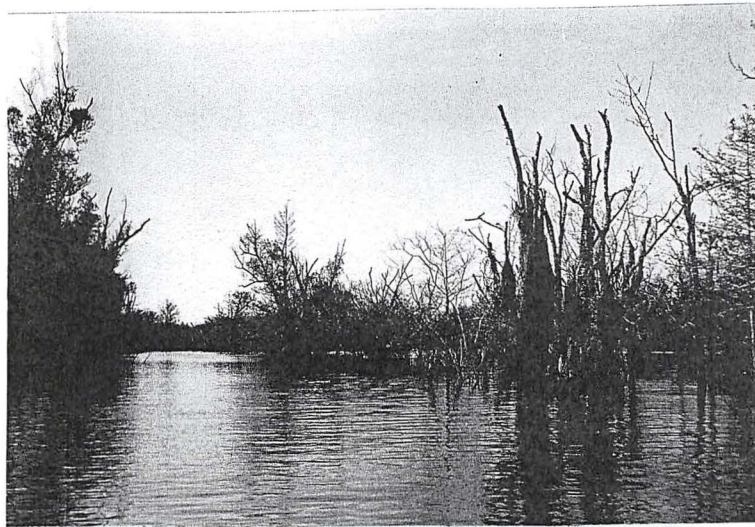
Scattered cypress trees enhance the pleasant scene along the waterways but do not constitute a typical cypress swamp.



One of the several private vacation cottages found along the waterways of the area.



Here and there cypress stumps such as these give note of the logging operation carried on some years ago. Cypress trees remaining are hollow or otherwise unmerchantable. No natural reproduction of cypress was noted.



Dead snags found along portions of the waterways indicate the unnatural water level maintained and detract from the otherwise pleasant scene.



This earth dam raises the water level about eight or ten feet above what it would otherwise be during dry period.

